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Phenomenology as a Method for Exploring Management Practice

Abstract

Phenomenology is a term that has been described as a philosophy, a research paradigm, a methodology, and equated with qualitative research. In this paper first we clarify phenomenology by tracing its movement both as a philosophy and as a research method. Next we make a case for the use of phenomenology in empirical investigations of management phenomena. The paper discusses a selection of central concepts pertaining to phenomenology as a scientific research method, which include description, phenomenological reduction and free imaginative variation. In particular, the paper elucidates the efficacy of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological research praxis as a qualitative research method and how its utility can be applied in creating a deeper and richer understanding of management practice.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Descriptive phenomenology, Management research, Management practice, Education management, Internal Marketing.

Introduction

Positivism has been and remains the dominant mode of conducting scientific investigations in management and organizational research. This dominance is well earned given that positivistic research paradigms have made some significant contributions to our understanding the complexities of management and organizations (Edwards, 2010). However, the emphasis on positivistic research paradigms has been driven by resultant pressures for publication in highly regarded journals, which purport to high quality and the attendant rewards of tenured positions. This emphasis on supposed quality unfortunately has not yet been able to address the dual demands of scholarly quality and relevance in the field

of management research (Pettigrew, 1997a). Moreover, despite several decades of debate, there is still lack of consensus as to whether research in management should focus on the development of academic theory or whether research in management should concentrate on providing scholarly solutions of practical relevance to organizations (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2009).

Unsurprisingly, there is now a growing sentiment amongst management research scholars that, since positivism is in part so much to blame for this lack of consensus, there should be a substantial consideration of other legitimate but non-positivistic ways of investigating management phenomena (Brown, 2003; Ehrich, 2005; Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Goulding, 2005). In addition, management research paradigms are infused with a bias against non-positivistic research tendencies, and as a consequence bridging the gap between the theory of management and the practice of management can be an illusive attempt (Easterby-Smith et al., 2009). This illusion is apparent in failure to recognize that management theory is discerningly different from managerial actions in organizations. Managerial actions are shaped by and entangled in a web of human tapestry, which relies heavily on competing human reciprocal actions (e.g. communication) and experiences. Therefore, this makes understanding the process of management in organizations a complex phenomenon. This complexity can indeed vary from one organization to another, which makes the demands and the logical examination of the relationship between management theory and management practices a more complex process.

Understanding the complexities associated with management practices in the organization, requires a worldview that invites a much deeper scrutiny of how individuals assign meanings to their everyday management actions and experiences in their natural settings not in contrived situations. This suggests a host of natural situations covering the intricate web of ‘lived’ human experiences that are difficult to capture with positivistic research paradigms.

To capture the web that constitutes the complex reality of lived experience requires adopting a worldview that embraces non-positivistic research forms, such as phenomenology. Unfortunately, phenomenology for far too long has remained an obscure term in the field of management research and a rarely employed lens through which management researchers have approached their empirical investigations of management phenomena in organizations (Gibson & Hanes, 2003). Many of the reasons for this obscurity arise not from any lack of scientific merits on the part of phenomenology as a qualitative research approach, but from the inaccessibility of these merits as a non-positivistic research paradigm. This situation does little to encourage management scholars who may be willing to embrace a phenomenological research approach.

For this reason, we make a case for the use of phenomenology in empirical attempts to investigate management concepts and phenomena. Specifically, we utilize Giorgi's (1985a) descriptive phenomenological research praxis to demonstrate active modes of understanding and explicating 'meanings' and the 'essences' of management experiences in organizations. The main purpose is to show that the phenomenological research paradigm is true to the traditions and conventions of scientific research investigation. The paper begins with a discussion of phenomenology both as a philosophy and as a research method. Within this, the phenomenological attributes of description, phenomenological reduction (including *epoché*), and free imaginative variation are outlined. The paper then proceeds to demonstrate how phenomenology can be applied, via the above phenomenological attributes, as a research method to understand the reality of management experience and practice. It achieves this by drawing upon empirical studies undertaken by the authors in two key aspects of management. The paper concludes with a discussion of the significance of phenomenology in contributing to management research. First, however, the current state-of-the-art in the field of management and organizational research has to be highlighted.

Management and organizational research - the 'state-of-the-art'

The use of phenomenology as a research approach in management and organizational studies is not much in evidence. The non-mainstream status and near absence of phenomenology in major citations and references in organizational and management studies bear testament to this fact. To examine these assertions empirically, a quick Boolean/Phrase search via the Business Resource Premier database (EBSCO) was used to query the terms 'phenomenology', Amedeo Giorgi, and Frederick Wertz (two well-known and strong advocates of the Duquesne School of phenomenological thought) to establish the frequency of appearance of these terms. The search parameters were limited to high-ranking[1] peer reviewed general business and management journals of United States and European origin published between 1936 and 2011 including those of marketing. This is because publication in these ranked journals is essential for achieving tenured positions at most business schools (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010). Amongst these, the *Journal of Management Studies* (1964 - present) returned five results (i.e. phenomenology); the *Journal of Marketing* (1936 - present) returned a nil result, whilst the *Journal of Marketing Research* (1964 – present) returned only one result. Similarly, Holt and Sandberg (2011) recently undertook a search using the terms: 'Phenomenology' and 'Husserl', 'Heidegger' and 'Schutz' (three well-known phenomenologists) to see how many times these terms appeared in eight leading journals in organization studies (two of these eight were management journals: *Academy of Management Journal* and *Academy of Management Review).* While 822 hits were recorded, a closer scrutiny indicated that the researchers who referred to these terms, 'rarely engage[d] more systematically with phenomenological concepts', which led Holt and Sandberg (2011) to conclude that a systematic engagement of phenomenological research method across the spectrum of management research field was "very rare" (p. 237).

[1] Definition of high ranking is considered to be a 4* journal in line with ABS Journal Rankings.

The above outcomes represent the under-utilization of phenomenology as a research approach in management studies. As others (e.g. Gibbons et al. 1994; Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001; Pettigrew, 1995; 1997a; Starkey, 1990) affirm, management researchers have much to gain by embracing phenomenology, particularly in our attempts to illuminate the 'lived' essences of management experiences and encounters in the organization. The growing calls for a diversity of means of pursuing our knowledge and understanding of management phenomena make the aforementioned point all the more pertinent. For instance, whilst Pettigrew (2001) calls for a new era of 'widening' and 'deepening' our exploration and experimentation with different modes of knowledge production in management scholarship, Starkey and Madan's (2001) most powerful message is for a greater commitment towards embracing non-positivistic research forms in attempts to bridge the relevance gap between management theory and management practices in the organization. To add to these exhortations, which bring to light some of the critical challenges we face as management researchers, is the need for an even greater degree of commitment towards embracing phenomenology in the investigations of management experiences. From a phenomenological perspective, individuals involved in the process of management in organizations are first and foremost embodied beings embedded in a specific 'lifeworld'. Phenomenological research can help to uncover 'lived' experiences within multiple constituencies that exist in the organization.

This is because phenomenology as a research approach mandates being present and faithful in considering the multifaceted meanings of 'lived' human encounters (Giorgi, 2009). Sadly, the logic and the science of the approach are usually opaque to the uninitiated, and often results in political debates rather than scientific or theoretical ones. Despite this reality, a handful of studies (e.g. Berglund, 2007; Goulding, 2005; Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2006; Kupers, 1998; 2002; 2005) has attempted to highlight the usefulness of phenomenology in conducting

organizational and management research. Similarly, there have been a number of management papers (e.g. Ehrich, 2005; Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Sanders, 1982) which urge organizational and management researchers to consider phenomenological analysis as a way of providing a better understanding of organizational and management concepts. On the basis of these, the key issue for management research scholars is to properly engage with phenomenology as a research approach by fully comprehending the efficacy of some scientific phenomenological attributes.

Phenomenology- *theoretical discussions*

Phenomenology has a philosophical and methodological trajectory that shares a commonality with other qualitative research strategies. One of its most distinguishing features is the peculiarity of its philosophical base, which is embedded in the phenomenological concept of *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) – the world of everyday lived experience. Historically, phenomenology emerged as a critique of positivism to dominate philosophy in the 20th century. A central figure to this dominance was Edmund Husserl - 1859 – 1938, who was influenced by Kantian ideology. Husserl formulated the scientific methods for the phenomenological movement in a way "uniquely fashioned to assist in the investigation of human experience" (Wertz, 2005, p. 167). For Husserl, phenomenology is a rigorous human science precisely because it investigates the way that knowledge comes into being and clarifies the assumptions upon which all human understandings are grounded. Husserl's teachings emphasize that the production of our 'knowledge of reality' should start with awareness of such experiences, as summed up in his famous phrase, '*to the things themselves*'.

As a branch of science and philosophy, phenomenology aims to develop a rigorous and unbiased study of subjective experience by exposing how our prejudgments impose themselves upon reality (Giorgi, 1985a). Although phenomenology deals with subjective

experience as part of its primary concern, its key interest is not subjectivity *per se*, but with complementing existing scientific paradigms and clarifying or removing other paradigm's unnecessary prejudgments, assumptions and biases (Giorgi, 1992a). Subjective experience is of interest to the phenomenologist only as an entrance point to understand the phenomenon under investigation since the aim of phenomenology is to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon rather than the essence of "a singular experience" (Gibson & Hanes, 2003, p. 193). This implies that the phenomenological tradition strives to be a rigorous science in its quest for 'meanings'. These meanings are revealed within the constraints of evidence through a system of rigor that involves going to the roots or the foundations of for instance, management phenomena in order "to be more clear about both what the basic concepts are and what they mean" (Cohen, 1987, p. 31).

In its modern sense, phenomenology as a philosophical movement is notorious for the fact that practically all of its major advocates differ substantially from one another (Giorgi, 2009). The competing phenomenological positions are characterized by what Cloonan (1995, p. 46) labeled as "syncretism." Before now, there was in fact a myriad of ways of conducting a phenomenological investigation (Dall'Alba 2009; Willis, 2004), and most of these were based on scholarly reading and informal analyses of experiential insights (Wertz, 2005). A categorization provided by Ehrich (1999) shows two major competing schools of thought within the phenomenological movement – the Utrecht School (Existential-hermeneutic e.g. van Manen) and the Duquesne School (descriptive phenomenology e.g. Amedeo Giorgi) as distinguished in Table 1 below. However, in an attempt to specify a formal procedure within the phenomenological movement, the Duquesne School under the influence and leadership of Amedeo Giorgi established robust systematic procedures for undertaking an empirical phenomenological study using publicly available data.

Following an extensive critical examination of the history of phenomenological research in American psychology, Cloonan (1995, p.46) found that of all the competing phenomenological positions "only the work of Amedeo Giorgi presented a human science approach that was radical and not compromised by natural science syncretions." More over, Giorgi's phenomenological prescription follows strictly the Husserlian phenomenological tradition, which is based on explication and description of experiential meanings by 'intuition of essences' (Husserl, 1962). Thus, in this paper, by using Giorgi's descriptive (1975, 1985a) phenomenological research praxis, we illustrate how phenomenology can be used to investigate management concepts and phenomena. As a research approach, Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology concerned with the experiential reality of the everyday 'meaning' of a phenomenon as well as the concrete particulars that make the phenomenon remain constant regardless of various ways in which its manifestations present themselves (Giorgi, 1997). This entails beginning with the experiences of those who may be affected by the phenomenon under investigation and "not theories" (Cohen, 1987, p. 31), and then in fulfilling subsequently the phenomenological operations of *description, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation* as outlined below.

Table one: A comparative summary of Duquesne School and the Utretch School

Description

Central to Giorgi's (1985a) phenomenological research praxis is descriptive analysis. By description, we mean the use of language to offer linguistic expression or communicate to others (e.g. the research community) the characteristics of for example, a management phenomenon, to which one is presented with as precisely as it is presented. In undertaking a descriptive analysis, the investigator is allowed to adopt a disciplinary language in articulating the emergent invariant or constant features of an investigated phenomenon in the way that participants have brought and/or presented their experience of (e.g. management) the phenomenon, and, by such articulation invokes the frame (i.e. the meanings evident in the experience) by which such a phenomenon has come to make sense. In other words, the attitude of description is to only respond to what can be accounted for in the description itself. Of course there are obvious attitudinal differences between descriptive analysis emphasized here and the task of interpretation common in qualitative research in general. The logical distinctions offered by Giorgi (2009) help bring to light some of these differences. With interpretation, the investigator seeks to clarify ambiguities in what is evidently given. That is, he or she seeks to come up with the best possible interpretation of an ambiguous situation and this often makes necessary the introduction of other nongiven factors, such as, assumptions, hypotheses, and theories in order to provide supposedly a 'good' interpretation. In contrast, in a descriptive analysis, one does not go beyond the 'given' by seeking or trying to resolve ambiguities in what is evidently expressed by the participants, unless there is a direct evidence that demands such resolution in the description itself. The aim is to understand and establish the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation based solely upon what is presented in the data i.e., to be as precise as possible with a minimum number of generalities or abstractions. That is, according to Giorgi (2009, p.127), "A descriptive result

is more inchoate; it dares not go beyond what is present. Gaps in the results are filled by obtaining more data, not by theoretical speculation." In essence, description has credibility if it has been rendered from within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction, which is the focus of our next discussion.

Phenomenological reduction

Phenomenological reduction is an important but much misunderstood scientific technique of the phenomenological research approach. It allows the investigator to 'bracket' or suspend (i.e. to disengage from) his or her theoretical biases about an investigated phenomenon. When biases and assumptions are suspended, it is perceived that what remains is the 'pure appearance' of the investigated account. This entails withholding the "existential index", i.e., describing "data precisely as they have been given through series of meanings transformation" (Giorgi 1997, p.240). From a practical perspective, adopting the phenomenological reduction does not mean that one's biases and prejudices about the investigated phenomenon have been completely forgotten or suddenly disappeared. Rather, the technique of phenomenological reduction allows one to reflect on the data and describe the meaning of what has been given as best one can "without the intermediacy of theories or hypotheses" (Churchill and Wertz, 1985, p.6). Phenomenological reduction is cognate with the term *epoché*[2], which sometimes is interchangeable with if not wrongly understood as 'bracketing' in the phenomenological tradition. Two logical moments occur simultaneously during the scientific reduction i.e. the *epoché* and the reduction proper[3]. In other words, the *epoché* and the reduction proper should be understood as "two internal *basic moments*[4] of the phenomenological reduction, mutually required and mutually conditioned" (Fink, 1995,

[2] By origin a Greek term meaning to refrain from judgment (abstention). See Wertz (2005) for an explanatory account of the significance of the *epoché* and the dynamics of its significance in a phenomenological study.

[3] An act of inquiring back into consciousness. - a technique that lays bare the condition for the possibility of knowledge to emerge.

[4] Internal logical moods, which do not refer to two steps that one should take in order to conclude the reduction process.

p.41). Each requires and conditions the other in a way that both occur at the same time (see also, Fink, 1933/1970; Husserl, 1983). Similarly, the reduction proper involves two moments – the first is *eidetic* reduction, i.e. the means by which the investigator moves from particular facts or consciousness towards the empirical realm of universal consciousness or general essences. The second stage is the reduction proper, the means by which the investigator achieves the *noema*[5], which captures the meaning of the intentional object of investigation. Bringing together all these subtle elements of the phenomenological reduction is the process of free imaginative variation.

Free Imaginative Variation

Free imaginative variation allows the investigator to embark upon the search for essences. An essence is the most invariant meaning of an investigated phenomenon - the articulation of a fundamental meaning of a particular account without which the account could not be what it was presented to be (Giorgi, 1997). The search for essences occurs within the attitude of free imaginative variation – a component of the reduction proper. According to Ehrich (2003), free imaginative variation "is used to investigate essences in order to determine what is secondary and what is unchangeable or essential" to a phenomenon or an investigated account (p.50). The overlapping nature of the above-highlighted phenomenological concepts suggests that the application of descriptive phenomenology as a qualitative research approach is a rigorous process. Overall, the approach is "descriptive, uses the phenomenological reductions, investigates the intentional relationships between persons and situations, and provides knowledge of the *phenomenological* essences (that is, the structure of meaning immanent in the human experience) through imaginative variation" (Wertz, 2005, p. 170

[5] A Greek word – which simply refers to the object of investigation as meant and intended. See Sokolowski (2008) pages 59-61 for a more detailed explanation of noema.

italics mine). These phenomenological operations become evident when understood within the context that through the process of phenomenological reduction and description, the phenomenological analysis seeks to provide a given account of the essence, and describes or articulates its fundamental meaning in a manner perceived as universal. Understanding and applying in a systematic fashion the inherent subtleties of these phenomenological concepts by observing them correctly are fundamental to any claim of rigorous phenomenological investigation.

To exemplify how the scientific merits of the phenomenological reduction, description, and imaginative variation are borne out, we draw upon two empirical cases studies we have undertaken in two key areas of management research. However, it has to be re-emphasized that the main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the method of phenomenology can be applied in the empirical investigation to create rich understanding of the reality of management experience and practice. As such, given our goal, we draw upon short explanations from these illustrative cases. In other words, we are only drawing on the cases to illustrate how to execute the phenomenological method rather than draw specific conceptual or practice outcomes pertaining to each case.

Case study 1: Principals and professional development (Ehrich, 1997)

The context for the study was the increasing influence of system-wide policy directives that were dictating the nature and type of professional development undertaken by school managers (i.e. school principals) and teachers in schools. A phenomenological investigation using the research methodology of Giorgi (1985a, 1985b) was employed to understand school managers' experience of professional development in addition to their responsiveness to teachers' professional development. For the purposes of this discussion, only the first research question is discussed here. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight school managers to explore their experience of professional development. Two interviews

were conducted with each of the participants during 1996. In keeping with phenomenological interview protocols (Giorgi, 1985a), participants were asked to describe concrete examples of professional development that they had experienced. Probes such as 'can you tell more about' and 'can you add to that' were used to gain as detailed descriptions as possible.

Participants in a phenomenological study describe specific experiences from 'an everyday attitude' (Giorgi 1997, p.7) since they cannot be expected to assume the attitude of *phenomenological reduction*. Following Giorgi (1985b), the phenomenological reduction occurs only when the researcher begins to analyze the descriptions provided by the participants. In doing so, the researcher bracketed her previous knowledge, understandings and theoretical insights relating to the phenomenon of professional development so that she was fully present to the descriptions provided by participants. Another strategy used by the researcher to achieve the reduction was recording her thoughts and feelings in a diary immediately following each of the interviews and during each step of the data analysis process.

According to Giorgi (1985b) there are a number of data analysis steps the phenomenological investigator should follow to achieve the key outcome of a phenomenological study, which is a general statement describing the structures of a phenomenon. The steps followed by the researcher are adumbrated here. Firstly, the researcher read the entire interview transcription in order to get a sense of its overall meaning. Secondly, the researcher broke down the text into more manageable units, known as 'meaning units' with a focus on the phenomenon. This involved breaking the transcript into sections and each section delineated a particular meaning unit. Thirdly, the researcher transformed the participant's every day expressions into psychological language paying attention to the phenomenon being investigated. Fourthly the process involved synthesizing the transformed meaning units into a specific statement of the

structure of the phenomenon. This process was followed for each participant and culminated in a specific statement representing the experience for each participant.

As there were multiple participants in the study, the final step involved moving from all of the participants' situated statements to writing one general statement that represented "the most general meaning of the phenomenon" (Giorgi 1985b, p.20). The process called upon the phenomenological device of *imaginative variatio*n whereby the researcher asks "what is essential" and "what is incidental", thus allowing the researcher to describe the essential structure of the concrete lived experience. For example, across a number of the specific statements was the meaning unit of professional development as a shared / social process, yet after employing *imaginative variation* it became apparent that professional development is not necessarily experienced within a social interaction; it can be experienced individually.

In the study under consideration, ten general statements were written which represented the findings. Part of one of these statements is below (the underscored statement at the beginning of the general statement represents an essential theme or a distillation of the general statement that follows):

> Professional development broadens one's outlook and permits one to see issues or things in a different or more extensive way. It involves learning something new or seeing something known in a different light, because something already known and understood cannot be learned. Professional development takes one beyond oneself into a new realm of understanding, perception and being. It provokes, challenges, and moves one along to a point further on the horizon.... (Ehrich, 1997, p.190)

On reflection, the phenomenological approach utilized in the study enabled the researcher to "see" the phenomenon anew, away from theoretical constructs and overarching frameworks developed in the literature towards an experiential view of professional development.

Case study 2 – Perceptions of management activities in organizations

The study explored managers' perceptions of a range of people management activities practiced by organizations including internal communication, empowerment, commitment, reward, motivation, and training. These activities are defined by the shorthand name of internal marketing (IM) concept. Given the lack of practitioners' "voice" in the academic debates about IM (Ahmed & Rafiq 2003; Anosike & Ahmed, 2009; Schultz, 2006, p. 7), the study sought to incorporate practitioners' voice in IM research domain. Since the study's focus was with exploring individual IM experiences rather than a particular experience of one or more organizations, it was easy to secure access to participants through a combination of personal contacts and referrals (Giorgi, 1992a; 1997; 2005; 2006b). As a criteria for participation in the study, participant(s) must have experienced the phenomenon of IM and able to articulate such experience.

Again, as with the first case, bracketing was applied in order to be fully present to the participants' descriptions of their IM experiences. Open-ended interviews were used to gather data from multiple participants who have encountered IM across various sectors of the business community. The use of multiple participants is in keeping with the notion that "one would rarely conduct [phenomenological] research with only one subject. The more subjects there are, the greater the variations, and hence the better the ability to see what is essential (Giorgi, 1985a, p. 19). The interviews took two forms: In the first form, the participants were asked to describe in as much detail as possible the daily instances in their organizational lives in which they have experienced IM. In the second aspect, they were each asked to describe in more specific and explicit details their understanding of IM as a management tool based on these experiences. The interviews yielded adequate data from which to undertake a rigorous phenomenological analysis. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed in line with Giorgi's (1997) descriptive phenomenological practice.

The analytical process

Staying within the phenomenological reduction, the first step was reading the entire interview transcript, followed by discriminating the data into 'meaning units'. As with every qualitative analysis, the aim in the second step was to establish some 'units of meaning' that would make it possible to do justice to the issue at stake in a manageable/realistic manner. This was necessary given that the descriptions obtained from participants were too long to be dealt with holistically. Operationally, still within the phenomenological reduction, the meaning units were established by re-reading the descriptions and recording each time a self-contained meaning relevant to the phenomenon (e.g. IM, management) under investigation was observed. Units of meaning were denoted with a forward slash (i.e., /), as shown in appendix one. Every time a significant shift was observed in the meaning of the phenomenon being described this slash was applied. Observation of shift in meanings was achieved by being sensitive to change in subject matter, change in themes and plots being described, signaling of different key terms or change in activities being described. As Giorgi (2009) clarifies, there is obviously a degree of arbitrariness in establishing the meaning units, which implies that different researchers could have different meaning units, because genuinely, transitions in meanings can occur at different points even with the same data. In other words, meaning units in themselves carry no theoretical weight, and intrinsically they lack external or material reality. What crucially matters "is how the meaning units are transformed (which is the next step) and how [and] to what extent, they are reintegrated into the structure of the experienced phenomenon" (Giorgi, 2009, p.130).

As a third step, each 'meaning units' was then transformed into management expressions without distorting their originally intended situated meanings. As illustrated in appendix two, this was the first time the participants' situated expressions were transformed into disciplinary meanings with the help of free imaginative variation. This was achieved by way

of clarifying the hidden management meanings i.e., aspects of the participants' original experiential accounts as they relate to the IM phenomenon. In the fourth step, still within the scientific reduction, each of the disciplinary expressions was 'interrogated' and 'thematized', which allowed for a more satisfactory disciplinary expression of the operating IM dynamics - i.e. the lifeworld IM descriptions. Thus, in some way, for the descriptive phenomenological analysis to be productive and meaningful within the field of management, the IM dimensions as contained in the transformed expressions were highlighted from a management perspective. In other words, the IM dimensions were "not just lying there [*i.e. in participants' expressions*] fully blown, ready to be picked out." They had to be "detected, drawn out, and elaborated" (Giorgi, 2009, p.13). This was achieved by adopting a phenomenological attitude in considering specifically the underlying research objective of the study i.e., what is the experiential essence of internal communication or employee commitment as emergent aspects of the IM phenomenon?' Each time a meaning or theme emerged (from the meaning units) that addressed this objective, such themes were re-described as they directly relate to the experience of IM.

For instance, after applying imaginative variation across different spectrum of situated meaning units of *Internal Communication*, it became obvious that this management practice was experienced as a two-way (reciprocal exchanges) process through emails, oral briefings and corporate videos. In the fifth step, the thematizations were synthesized and linked together into a general statement of essential disciplinary meanings that focused on the IM phenomenon. Again, as illustrated in appendix two, the synthesized meanings continued to include the correctness and the specifics of their situated characters. As there were multiple participants, the final step culminated into a general description of IM phenomenon as shown below. This outcome was not a theoretical definition of IM per se, but a general description of the invariant features that emerged (through series of meanings transformation) to

represent the structure of the IM phenomenon as experienced or encountered by the participants interviewed. Therefore, similar to the above case, following the phenomenological analysis it was possible to develop a much deeper understanding of the 'meanings' and the 'essences' the IM phenomenon as a management practice as well as its different organizational manifestations. My understanding of IM moved from theoretical influences and overarching conceptual frameworks developed in the literature towards an experiential view of IM as presented by the managers interviewed. Thus, from a phenomenological perspective, IM is experienced:

> in a situation of mutual exchanges across departmental and individual hierarchies using emails, videos, and oral briefing. IM also is experienced as a form of understanding the organization through employee interviews. Participants perceive that line-management support is an IM essence manifested when managers devote time to listen and to provide emotional support to their subordinates. The confidence and reassurance that comes from employee training and information sharing, and the appreciation of individual achievements were equally attributed to IM experience. These experiential IM attributes are perceived to empower and motivate the individual to act on behalf of the organization, which makes him or her committed to organizational goals.

Contributions of phenomenology to management research

As argued earlier in the paper, management studies have tended to be dominated by positivist research designs and methodologies. While, in recent decades, there has been a strong call by qualitative researchers to redress the imbalance (see Gummesson 2000; Morgan & Smirchich 1980), a systematic engagement of phenomenology has received very little take-up by researchers in the field (Holt & Sandberg 2011; Gibson & Hanes 2003). In the final part of this paper we consider the contribution that phenomenology might make to the study of management or management research and implications for management practices. By management research we mean such fields as "general management, leadership, marketing, organization, corporate strategy [and] accounting" (Gummesson, 2000, p.1) as well as research on employee attitudes, human resource management and production operations

(Sekaran, 2000). To this we would add educational management, which refers to the management of personnel in schools, universities, and other educational contexts.

Management has been viewed traditionally as a technique of control (DeSanto & Moss 2004), or a set of rational behaviors performed by managers that include planning, leading, organizing and controlling (Mukhi, Hampton & Barnwell, 1988). Yet management is not purely instrumental, functional or rational. It is both messy and complex (De Santo & Moss 2004) because it involves people. In contrast to a technical approach that views management as a set of skills and a body of knowledge to be grasped, a phenomenological approach is concerned with managers and the way they experience management. It is interested in organizations as life-worlds where managers and those with whom they work are understood through the experience of management. The central focus of management studies 'is producing knowledge about human action and activities in organizations' (Sandberg, 2005, p.41).

Phenomenology, therefore, is an appropriate research approach to heighten awareness and understanding about complex phenomena such as management and management related activities as they exist and are experienced in the real world of practice. This is relevant when we consider how the relations between research in management, and management as a practice are governed. In their pure forms, positivistic research paradigms are known to be inappropriate to understanding certain types of management practices. This is because social contexts and processes, which are "not always observable in an objective way", often characterize management practices, and "because social processes are rarely reducible to absolute laws" (Partington, 2000, p. 98). From this dimension, this paper has provided a much-needed counterpoint to the positivist-based approach to governing these relations. Our goal is to re-engage those who feel alienated by positivistic agenda, weaken the barriers to non-mainstream methods in management research field, and integrate the repertoire of

phenomenology as a relevant discourse in management research field. Thus, theoretically, the paper has raised the awareness that non-positivist research forms, which examine actual experiences of managers as 'human' agencies of management practices, can be valuable because of their potential for building and validating management theory "as well as for designing and re-designing organisations" (Daft & Lewin, 1990, p.3).

Contributions of phenomenology to management practices

Underlying the above theoretical contributions is the importance and relevance of phenomenology to understanding the world of management practice. Specifically, we stress and maintain that phenomenological inquiries can enhance both knowledge and practice for practitioners on a number of levels. At a practical level for instance, apart from providing managers with a window of access to influence (through their subjective accounts and experiences of management) empirical realities of investigations of management phenomena, the paper builds on the specific idea that there is benefit in encouraging diverse perspectives and methods that pursue multiple realities of organisational life. In essence, the paper has reinforced the long-standing, but often lost assumption, that the interplay between management theory and management practice can only be effective by working together in a mutually transdisciplinary frame - i.e., academics and managers learning from one another "in a virtuous cycle of understanding, explication and action" (Partington, 2000, 91).

In concurrence with Gibson and Hanes (2003), we argue that engagement with a phenomenological research approach would provide an opportunity for managers to articulate their experiences and therefore become more aware of themselves and their management actions – more importantly, how their actions constitute the bases for empirical knowledge and for shaping organizational policies. Second, the outcomes of such studies would be useful not only for staff with whom managers work on a daily basis but also their supervisors, as the outcomes of a phenomenological investigation would provide insights into the

phenomena studied, thus contributing different types of understanding about particular management phenomena. As Gibson and Hanes (2003) suggest, participants, researchers, and members within the organization with whom managers work, all stand to benefit from the dissemination of phenomenological studies.

We established via two case illustrations of phenomenological research in the field of management, that phenomenology is valuable in unraveling the essential structures of professional development and the IM phenomenon as they are lived. Thus, we argue that phenomenology has great potential to understand the meanings of a variety of management phenomena and address a variety of management questions. Questions directed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday human and management experiences and which address the complex and ambiguous 'inner realities" of management can benefit from a phenomenological research approach. We suggest that an over-reliance on the positivist paradigm, with its emphasis on reducing human experiences to something that can be measured, has a tendency to preclude vital meanings of human encounters in the organization. Through phenomenological research investigations a deep and rich insight into the nature of management practices can be achieved.

Finally, Husserl's aim was to develop a philosophy and a psychology that turned away from science and scientific knowledge and returned to the things themselves so that the essential structures of knowledge could be known. This was an ambitious feat. An important consequence of this feat was the phenomenological research method, which entails a careful and systematic description of the essential character of the experienced phenomenon from within a phenomenological attitude, determined by a process of free imaginative variation. The value of the phenomenological research method for management in this context is therefore two-fold: (1) it allows a more holistic understanding of the nature of management experience in organizations, the essential nature of which has eluded management research

thus far, and (2) the phenomenological research method promises the methodological framework upon which to build the groundwork for more rigorous theory building and empirical testing of management concepts. In this sense, there is much merit to look anew at empirical investigations of management phenomena, outside the confines of theoretical perspectives and conceptual presuppositions. To do so is to strengthen and complement the current management research agenda as well as encourage utility of diverse research paradigms that enrich understandings of management experience in the organization.

Utretch School (Existential-Hermeneutic)	Duquesne School (Empirical Phenomenology)
Influenced by "human science pedagogy" and the Dutch movement of phenomenological research approach	Used insights from phenomenological philosophy to develop a human science approach to (psychology) phenomenological research
Key concepts include description, interpretation, phenomenological reduction, essences and intentionality	Key concepts include description, phenomenological reduction, free imaginative variation, search for essences, and intentionality.
Attempts to provide insights into human experience	Attempts to provide accurate descriptions of aspects of human experience/phenomenon
Focus is on the phenomenon under investigation	Focus is on the phenomenon under investigation
Outcome is usually a piece of narrative or writing which interprets the meaning of human experience or phenomenon and understanding the lived structures of meaning	Outcome is usually a general structural narrative/statement which describes the essential structures of the phenomenon being investigated
Outcome is a piece of narrative or writing which interprets the meaning of human experience or phenomenon and understanding the lived structures of meaning	Outcome is a general structural narrative/statement that describes the essential structures of the phenomenon being investigated.
May use "self" as a starting point, relies on others and other sources (i.e. fiction and non-fiction, observation, etc) of data.	Relies mainly on others (e.g. participants) for data.
Uses imaginative variation to help illuminate themes during data analysis	Uses imaginative variation to help illuminate themes during data analysis (i.e. meaning transformations).
Uses less prescriptive methods of doing research.	Follows a fairly strict method (e.g. participant interviews) of data collection and data analysis.
Not inductively empirically derived	An empirical analytic science
Has a strong moral dimension	Does not necessarily have a strong moral dimension

(Adapted from Ehrich, L.C. 1999)

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Appendix One

Established meaning units - P2's data

Q: In as much detail as possible, can you describe the situations in which internal marketing has occurred for you?

1. **P2**: These are instances where companies use a lot of tools. Let me say Nokia tends to communicate to me, they are sharing information with me, they're using webcast for that or emails, PowerPoint presentations. If it comes down via management line, I get my information./
2. Nokia tries to or wants to be perceived as an open organization where everyone can communicate with each other. Of course we are Nokia, and Nokia is a communication company. You see as well within different departments as we're communicating between different departments, We call America, We call China, China calls us, I get emails from them, I get requests from them. Projects are being mailed so that what I do for a customer in the UK might be helpful for a customer in Bulgaria or in Holland or Denmark, we then talk to the people, we try to help or they try to help us. /
3. I think it comes down to the attitude in the company that we are left with this idea to be open to each other. Probably, it takes a Nokia person to do this, /
4. may be in the recruitment process they are willing to get people in who are easy to share information with or like to talk or find it very interesting to talk to people from different countries, different cultures and different backgrounds./
5. Training of course, is one thing we do a lot in Nokia, also the technology is moving fast, but also we get a lot of soft skills training where we are taught to communicate, to hold the mirror in front of ourselves, and look at ourselves the way we communicate with each other, the way we can improve communication with each other. Training is one of the things within Nokia we have./
6. Because of these internal marketing schemes that Nokia is using, they probably get more commitment out of us, we're more committed to be part of the whole Nokia experience, and of course, that is what the company wants./ They give me this motivation, all the secondary things, you get service excellent, bonuses, you're allowed to take your girlfriend out for a dinner in posh restaurants, and holidays, these are the tools they use to motivate me, and broadband, everything I have, that's what we get./

Q: What part of that experience will you consider internal marketing?

7. **P2**: I think internal marketing is the big picture as I see my management they're probably trying to keep me, and that is their aim because they lost a lot of time. The first two years in my job you are next to not useful, they're not making any money out of you. So the longer they can keep you, the more viable you can be to them,/
8. but of course, it's not only keeping you, but also being motivated and committed to get up in the morning at 5O'clock and be in Bristol at 8O'clock to speak to your customers, to be there for your customers and to get this commitment and get this motivation./
9. Nokia of course, they're smart people, they try to use this internal marketing, it's a tool for them to keep me smiling, keep me happy and motivated. For example, I did a big project at the start of the year, and at the end of that year I got a nice bonus out of it. They, I wasn't completely happy how they gave it to us, may be that is the UK thing, I got a nice envelope, and in there was a large amount of money, which was nice. That of course, is one of the internal marketing tools they have./

Appendix Two

Disciplinary Transformations – P2's data

Disciplinary expressions	Determined IM Structure	Synthesized IM Structure
P2 recalls instances in which his organization tends to use various tools, such as, webcast, emails and PowerPoint presentations to communicate and share information with him. P2 indicates that he gets his information through the management structure.	P2 describes his IM experience as instances in which his organization, uses various communication tools, such as, webcast, emails and PowerPoint presentations in order to communicate and share information with him	There was a perception that internal marketing involves the use of webcast, emails and PowerPoint presentations to communicate and share information with employees.
4. P2 asserts that training is encouraged and widespread in the company because technology is constantly evolving. P2 also affirms that they equally undergo soft skills training in which they are taught communication skills. P2 uses the imagery of a mirror metaphorically to demonstrate the importance of communication, as a way in which individuals are encouraged to improve upon their communication with colleagues. P2 emphasizes that training is one of things supported within his organization.	4. From being aware of the relevance of training and interactions amongst individuals and across departments, P2 states that training is taken seriously within his company, as it is vital to sustaining and enhancing interdepartmental and interpersonal communication amongst different levels of employees	The experience of the importance of employee training in the organization is underscored by its emphasis as part of IM tool used in enhancing interactions amongst employees.
5. P2 asserts that his company probably gets employees to be more committed and be part of the whole company experience through internal marketing tools, which as he perceives, is what the company desires. P2 states that the company also tries to motivate him using a range of bonus schemes e.g. paid holidays, broadband, to reward him for excellent customer service. P2 admits that most of his belongings came from being rewarded.	5. P2 states that his company aims to use internal marketing in form of reward schemes (bonuses, paid holiday and broadband services) to bring about employee motivation and commitment. P2 asserts that his company uses such schemes to reward employees for instance, for delivering excellent customer service, and the perceived influence of such internal marketing tools on employee commitment and motivation was perceived as one of the purposes and/or goals of internal marketing experience.	The awareness the company uses reward tools, such as, bonuses, paid holiday and broadband services as part of internal marketing strategy was perceived as vital to employee motivation and commitment.